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Follow-up to and implementation of the outcome of the 2002 International Conference on Financing for Development and the 2008 Review Conference

Follow-up to and implementation of the Monterrey Consensus and Doha Declaration on Financing for Development

Report of the Secretary-General**

Summary

Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 63/208, the present report describes recent developments in relation to the review process on financing for development and the implementation of the Monterrey Consensus. The main developments are presented under each of the six thematic chapter headings of the Monterrey Consensus document: mobilizing domestic financial resources for development; mobilizing international resources for development: foreign direct investment and other private flows; international trade as an engine for development; increasing international financial and technical cooperation for development; external debt; and addressing systemic issues: enhancing the coherence and consistency of the international monetary, financial and trading systems in support of development. Other recent developments are presented in section VII, entitled "Staying engaged".

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** The report has been prepared in close consultation with staff from the major institutional stakeholders involved in the financing for development process. Responsibility for its contents, however, rests solely with the United Nations Secretariat.

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I. Mobilizing domestic financial resources for development

Impact of the crisis on developing economies

1. The global financial and economic crisis, which originated in developed countries, has become a development emergency of global reach, putting at risk the very survival of poor people.[1] The world is entering a period of markedly slower economic growth[2] which will have a strong negative impact on developing countries, which are affected by a collapse in world trade, a sharp reversal in private capital inflows, falling commodity prices and a slowdown in remittance flows to poorer countries, as well as the loss of income and employment due to the contraction of global economic activity.[3] As if this were not enough, there is a risk that existing commitments of official development assistance (ODA) may not materialize, or that aid levels may even be scaled down owing to concomitant fiscal pressures on industrialized countries. As a result, developing countries will have fewer resources to undertake critical investments in, inter alia, infrastructure, human development and social safety nets, and building trade and productive capacities. More immediately, Governments will also have less space in which to undertake fiscal expansionary measures to counter the economic downturn.

2. Developing countries have been affected by the crisis to varying degrees, depending on their economic structure, their integration into the global economy and their vulnerability to shocks. The impact of the crisis will also be shaped by the ability of Governments to implement countervailing macroeconomic policies and social programmes. This may influence how different groups within societies, including the poorest and marginalized communities, are affected. The poorest countries are especially vulnerable in that they are heavily dependent on external finance (notably aid) and trade, they rely on a few commodities for their foreign exchange earnings and their social protection systems are unable to respond fully to the crisis.[4] The crisis is having a negative impact on economic and social prospects in developing countries, even in those which have made significant improvements in macroeconomic management and fundamentals in recent years.

3. Few developing countries are in a position to undertake significant countercyclical spending. While most of the global stimulus is correctly being undertaken by developed countries, a concentration of this spending in the more industrialized regions could further skew the distribution of global income. There has as yet been no explicit coordination of the fiscal measures being undertaken by Governments. For developing countries to play their part in boosting demand, it is important that resources be transferred to them. The members of the Group of Twenty recognized this during their meeting in London in April 2009, although the resources they agreed to transfer are insufficient to enable developing countries to

[1] See World Bank, *Global Monitoring Report 2009: A Development Emergency* (Washington, D.C., 2009).

[2] World Bank, Global Development Finance database, June 2009.

[3] See United Nations, *World Economic Situation and Prospects 2009*, Update as of mid-2009. Available from http://www.un.org/esa/policy/wess/wesp2009files/wesp09update.pdf.

[4] Report of the Secretary-General on the world financial and economic crisis and its impact on development, to be submitted to the General Assembly at its present session.

ensure a more balanced global stimulus aligned with their long-term development needs.[5]

4. This issue of how developing countries could counter the effects of the crisis, and the roles of the United Nations and the international financial institutions in this area, was a theme in most interventions at the special high-level meeting of the Economic and Social Council with the Bretton Woods institutions, the World Trade Organization and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, held in New York on 27 April 2009. Many made the point that greater supplementary funding should be made available by the international community, including through the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for countercyclical stimulus measures in such countries. Procyclical measures involving reductions in fiscal spending should be avoided. Procyclical adjustments by individual countries induced by the lack of required resources would be in direct conflict with the agreed global effort to overcome the collapse in private consumption and investment afflicting all countries. As requested at the meeting of the Group of Twenty in London, IMF and other lending institutions must demonstrate greater flexibility in their lending practices.

Effect on poverty and sustainable development

5. The current global crisis will lead to rising poverty in many developing countries through a reduction in employment and income opportunities. The precise overall impact of the crisis on global poverty is difficult to estimate since the problems have yet to bottom out, countries are affected to varying degrees and their capacity to respond and provide social protection also varies significantly. According to International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates, at least another 50 million people worldwide could become unemployed,[6] many owing to the closure of export-oriented industries. In addition to unemployment, there will also be increased underemployment as, in the absence of adequate social protection, many people who have lost their jobs move to working in the informal sector. According to estimates by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, a significant drop in per capita income growth in 2009 would significantly slow progress towards poverty reduction. Between 73 and 103 million more people are estimated to remain poor or fall into poverty as a result of the crisis, with all developing regions being affected.[7] Indeed, the poverty impact of the crisis may be even greater than these figures suggest once its distributional consequences are factored in. Inequality is likely to rise as lower-income workers are more likely to face unemployment or cuts in wages. At the same time, possible cutbacks in social expenditure as a result of the budgetary pressures brought about by the crisis would disproportionately affect the poorest segments of the population.[8] Finally, declining remittances may also contribute to rising poverty, especially in those countries for which remittance flows are large relative to gross domestic product (GDP).

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[5] United Nations, *World Economic Situation and Prospects 2009*, Update.

[6] ILO, *Global Employment Trends, January 2009* (Geneva, International Labour Office, 2009).

[7] See United Nations, *World Economic Situation and Prospects 2009*, Update.

[8] Note by the Secretariat on the current global crises and their impact on development (E/CN.5/2009/CRP.2). Available from http://unstats.un.org/unsd.

6. It is clear that the global financial and economic crisis will have long-term developmental implications for developing countries. It has already seriously set back the development efforts of the poorer countries and increased the magnitude of the challenges confronting them. Even before the crisis, many countries were having difficulties, exacerbated by the food and volatile energy prices, in staying on track to meet most of the Millennium Development Goals. Rising poverty and lower government revenue to finance social expenditures will further set back their efforts to achieve the Goals. The precise impact of the crisis on the achievement of the Goals will vary from country to country, as will the cost of the additional efforts needed to bring countries back on track towards meeting the targets.

7. It is therefore critically important that attention be directed to protecting the poor by the sustainment of employment and livelihoods and targeted social spending, including expanded safety nets. More than at any other time, countries should align their fiscal stimulus programmes with longer-term development objectives in areas such as infrastructure, education and health. In addition, funds can also be targeted towards microenterprises and small and medium-size enterprises which play an important role in helping to generate employment and lifting individuals and communities out of poverty. According to the World Bank, a number of initiatives are under way to support the provision of finance to small and medium-size enterprises, including through the use of public guarantees to private financial institutions.[9]

8. The crisis also presents a resource mobilization challenge in global efforts to address climate change. Adaptation to climate change needs to be included in development plans, including investment programmes, in all countries. Moreover, the investment requirements of adaptation may be significant in relation to government budgets for countries that are especially vulnerable to the effects of climate change. The overall cost of adaptation to climate change risks in the developing world is estimated to be in the range of $4 billion to $37 billion per year. It is imperative that the increasing challenge of financing climate change adaptation and mitigation be addressed by the international community during the fifteenth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, to be held in Copenhagen in December 2009.

Broader policy lessons

9. While the immediate priority for all countries is to hasten an economic recovery, it is also important for developing countries to distil longer-term lessons learned from the crisis in respect of financial sector development and development strategies. The given wisdom relating to financial sector development has tended to emphasize the importance of greater diversification and competition, a balance between debt and equity forms of finance, and better enforcement of contracts and regulations. Recent experience, however, suggests that it is equally necessary for relevant national authorities to adopt a regulatory approach that can serve to protect financial systems from crises while preserving their ability to conduct efficiently their core activities. In this context, various proposals have been given serious

[9] "Swimming against the tide: how developing countries are coping with the global crisis", background paper prepared by World Bank staff for the Meeting of Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors of the Group of Twenty, Horsham, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, 13 and 14 March 2009.

consideration in both national and international policy circles, including measures that encourage countercyclical lending by financial institutions and stronger oversight by policymakers, at the national and international levels, of financial market activities. In addition, within the framework of multilateral cooperation, the enhancement of regional cooperation and dialogue, the institution of regional economic and financial monitoring mechanisms or the establishment of reserve funds and arrangements for effective currency swaps in times of crisis can also help to reduce the impact of abrupt changes in private capital flows.

10. The role of countercyclical policy towards achieving macroeconomic stability in a broad sense, which includes not only price stability and sound fiscal policies but also business cycles of smaller size, sustainably competitive exchange rates, sound external debt portfolios and healthy domestic financial systems and private sector balance sheets (see A/59/800, para. 21), has garnered much attention. Countries should consider expanding the range of policy tools to include the establishment of countercyclical funds, selective and targeted public spending and the enhanced use of tax systems to manage booms and busts.

11. Many of these issues were explored during deliberations in the run-up to the Follow-up International Conference on Financing for Development to Review the Implementation of the Monterrey Consensus, held in Doha from 29 November to 2 December 2008. With respect to domestic resource mobilization, an important new commitment was made by Governments on the issue of taxation. Strengthened international tax cooperation should form a critical element of a more effective global system of financial regulation. In the Doha Declaration on Financing for Development,[10] Governments specifically requested the Economic and Social Council to examine the strengthening of existing institutional arrangements, including the Committee of Experts on International Cooperation in Tax Matters.

II. Mobilizing international resources for development: foreign direct investment and other private flows

12. Private capital flows to developing countries have dropped sharply in the wake of the global financial crisis. Net private capital inflows to developing economies have declined, from a peak of around $700 billion registered in 2007 to less than $400 billion in 2009. In tandem with this trend, there has been a sharp rise in the costs of external financing for developing countries, illustrated by the huge increase in the risk premium on lending to emerging economies from 250 to about 800 basis points during the third quarter of 2008. Moreover, the increase in risk spreads has been uniform across developing regions, confirming the existence of contagion and a general aversion to investment in global financial markets.

13. The decline in private capital flows encompasses all developing regions, with the most substantial fall taking place in emerging Europe. This trend will also have an impact on parts of Africa since the continent has also been relying increasingly on private capital inflows, although the flows are small in global terms. Given the size of most domestic capital markets in Africa, even a small decline in these flows could have a sizeable impact on the prices of securities. There were no international bond issues by African countries in 2008 as a consequence of the global credit

[10] General Assembly resolution 63/239, annex.

crunch. Some countries, notably Kenya, Nigeria, the United Republic of Tanzania and Uganda, have had to cancel plans to raise funds in international capital markets for infrastructure projects.

14. The sharp fall in foreign direct investment (FDI), which contracted by about 15 per cent in 2008, has been driven by a marked weakening in corporate profits and falling global capital spending. Of most concern is that falling FDI flows could also have implications for infrastructure projects which are critical for longer-term growth. A significant infrastructure financing gap has already emerged in many developing countries, with longer-term needs far exceeding the amounts that are currently being invested. According to World Bank estimates, developing countries would at present need to invest an estimated 7-9 per cent of their GDP in infrastructure annually if they are to achieve growth and poverty reduction goals, in comparison with the 3-4 per cent that they currently invest. Investments in public and private infrastructure projects tend to decline substantially during and immediately after economic crises. For example, infrastructure investment dropped substantially after the financial crisis of the late 1990s in East Asia and had not recovered to pre-crisis levels by 2007. According to the World Bank's Public-Private Infrastructure Advisory Facility, the value of public-private infrastructure projects that reached financial closure between August and November 2008 was down 40 per cent compared to one year earlier.

15. Looking beyond the circumstances and impact of the present crisis, attracting adequate amounts of private finance into infrastructure projects will continue to be a challenge in many countries owing to concerns among private investors about regulatory risk, credit risk and currency risks. While public provision of infrastructure remains fundamental, rising financing needs and fiscal pressures have led many countries to seek private participation in the provision and financing of infrastructure projects. Through measures to mitigate some of the risks facing private investors, multilateral organizations and Governments can try to attract a greater volume of private capital into infrastructure projects. As suggested in a recent study issued by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD),[11] current risk mitigation programmes are not sufficiently tailored to circumstances in low-income countries.

16. Risk mitigation and capacity-building, as well as measures to improve the enabling business environment, can also serve to expand the distribution of FDI to a greater number of developing countries and to sectors such as human resources, transport, energy, communications and information technology. At the same time, these efforts should be accompanied by measures to maximize the development impact of these flows. In this regard, the Doha Declaration on Financing for Development contains a specific commitment by Governments to strengthen national and international efforts aimed at maximizing linkages between transnational corporations and domestic production activities, enhancing the transfer of technology and creating training opportunities for the local labour force.

17. There has also been a sharp drop in other categories of private capital flows to developing countries. The sharpest drop has been in bank lending to emerging economies, reversing inflows of about $400 billion in 2007 into a projected net

[11] UNCTAD, "Assessing the impact of the current financial and economic crisis on FDI flows" (UNCTAD/DIAE/IA/2009/5), Geneva, April 2009.

outflow in 2009. Moreover, a large volume of international bank debt to corporations in developing countries matures in 2009. A number of corporations, including small and medium-size enterprises, may run into difficulties in rolling over their debt. Furthermore, corporations that previously relied on foreign funding may try to shift to domestic funding markets, adding to pressures on smaller local enterprises. Portfolio flows to developing countries have also contracted sharply owing to contagion and an increased risk aversion by institutional investors.

18. In the longer term, however, it is necessary for policymakers to address issues relating to the inherent instability of many categories of private capital flows. The problems begin with inadequacies in regulation and oversight at the national and international levels. Existing regulatory approaches have been traditionally confined to improved disclosure, prudential controls and risk management. These are now generally seen as insufficient to mitigate the inherent procyclicality of private capital flows and need to be accompanied by the establishment on further development of countercyclical regulations and instruments and institutions that effectively supervise all of the sources of systemic risk emanating from financial markets, including the activities of hedge funds and cross-border flows. There should, moreover, be greater scope for countries to employ measures to effectively curb excessive short-term capital inflows without discouraging inflows of longer-term finance.

19. Officially recorded remittance flows to developing countries have been registering double-digit annual growth in the past few years and totalled more than $300 billion in 2008 (three times the level of ODA flows to developing countries). For several small economies, remittances account for more than 20 per cent of GDP. The projected decline of remittances in 2009, across all developing regions, is therefore expected to create hardships in many poor countries, since they have been important sources of support for consumption and development.

III. International trade as an engine for development

20. The role that trade can play in fostering economic development is well established. Trade can generate gains for developing countries, in most cases more than any other area of international economic cooperation. The impact on growth and employment of the collapse in the volume of trade in the current crisis amply demonstrates this critical role.

Declining trade volumes

21. The World Trade Organization (WTO) reports that world merchandise trade growth slid to 5.5 per cent in 2007 from 8.5 per cent in 2006.[12] Initially, WTO projected 4.5 per cent growth in 2008, but has since reduced this estimate to 2 per cent in view of the sharp drop in global production in the fourth quarter of 2008.

[12] WTO press release No. 554 dated 23 March 2009.

22. For 2009, WTO has predicted that trade growth will slide a further 9 per cent. UNCTAD predicts that goods exports globally will fall between 6 and 8 per cent.[13] The mid-2009 update to *World Economic Situation and Prospects 2009*[14] projects an even steeper fall, with world trade declining 11.1 per cent in 2009 (the largest such decline since the Great Depression of the 1930s). The update gives a baseline scenario of 4.1 per cent growth in world trade in 2010, based on a bottoming out in the fall in real economic activity by the end of 2009.

23. This collapse in world trade is disproportionately affecting developing countries. Falling demand for imports of both commodities and finished goods have contributed to this trend, as have falling prices of commodities in particular, the difficulty in accessing, and the high costs of, trade financing, and reduced government expenditure financed through trade tariffs.

24. The situation for commodity exporters is especially difficult. From 2002 to mid-2008, many countries gained from the generally upward trend in the prices of oil and non-oil commodities. The intensification of the global financial crisis since mid-2008 has, however, led to a sharp reversal in this trend. Oil prices plummeted by more than 70 per cent from their peak levels of mid-2008 and although recent rises have been significant, the volatility in pricing creates further difficulties.

25. Similarly, the prices of metals fell by 50 per cent, while the prices of some other commodities also declined significantly. There has been some rebound, but markets remain at a low ebb and are highly volatile. Export earnings and government revenue will likely continue to be depressed in many developing countries. Food and energy-importing countries may see their terms of trade improve, although in most cases these gains may be more than offset by the collapse in export demand, the increased cost of borrowing and/or falling remittance flows. Among net exporters of commodities, low-income countries are being hit hardest by plunging world market prices because primary exports comprise, on average, 70 per cent of their total exports. In addition, a high share of government revenue comes from taxes on these exports.

Risks of protectionism

26. In response to collapsing domestic production and employment, protectionist trade measures have begun to be observed in national recovery policies. World Bank data indicate that 17 of the countries taking part in meetings of the Group of Twenty have, among them, implemented 47 measures that restrict trade at the expense of other countries. Developing countries are likely to suffer disproportionately from any surge in protectionism, because they often export products that are particularly sensitive to protectionist measures, do not have the resources to engage in retaliatory measures and generally lack the safety nets that assist those affected by such actions. In addition to trade protectionism, there could be an increase in anti-competitive practices to preserve market positions.

27. Calls to avoid protectionism have become commonplace in meetings of world leaders, such as at the recent meetings of Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation and

[13] UNCTAD, report of the UNCTAD secretariat entitled "Global economic crisis: implications for trade and development" (TD/B/C.I/CRP.1). Available in English only from http://www.unctad.org/en/docs/cicrp1_en.pdf.

[14] Available from http://www.un.org/esa/policy/wess/wesp2009files/wesp09update.pdf.

the leaders of the Group of Twenty. The true test remains whether or not countries in practice engage in such protectionism or reject it, recognizing the corrosive social and economic impact of the beggar-thy-neighbour policies that prevailed in the 1930s, with disastrous consequences. In its annual report for 2009,[15] WTO observed the rise of protectionist tendencies in the context of the crisis, noting that the number of anti-dumping initiations increased by 28 per cent in 2008, compared to 2007.

28. In dealing with the global crisis, it is important to recognize and consolidate the multilaterally agreed, rules-based trade disciplines represented in the WTO and earlier General Agreements on Tariffs and Trade arrangements. These arrangements recognize legitimate trade measures in response to emergencies, particularly in the conservation of foreign exchange. Demonstrating the ability of the system to alleviate the depth of the crisis through the legitimate use by members of their trade policy space is important to making further progress in strengthening it. Differentiating between trade-restricting measures adopted for protectionist purposes and those legally provided for in international rules is therefore important. Moreover, such measures are certainly preferred to competitive devaluations, for which the present international system has no effective disciplines. The ultimate objective of staging a recovery in world trade will involve the return of domestic production and demand in a wide variety of economies. Within the global trade disciplines already agreed, it is in the global interest for individual countries to undertake recovery policies that are appropriate to their particular situation.

29. South-South trade remains a beacon of hope in the current climate. While such trade has also declined, it nevertheless remains robust having experienced dynamic growth in past years. In 2007, South–South merchandise trade, in terms of exports, had increased more than threefold since 1995 and amounted to more than 46 per cent of the total trade of developing countries.[16]

Doha Development round

30. The ongoing WTO trade negotiations under the Doha Development Agenda seek, inter alia, to establish a fairer and more equitable trading system for all WTO members by addressing inequities in current multilateral trading rules.

31. In the Doha Declaration, the international community reiterated its urgent resolve to ensure that ongoing efforts improve the operation of the multilateral trading system to better respond to the needs and interests of all developing countries, in particular the least developed countries. It also called for the implementation of the ministerial declaration of WTO, adopted at its Sixth Ministerial Conference, held in Hong Kong, China, on the central importance of the development dimension in every aspect of the Doha Development Agenda work programme and its commitment to making the development dimension a meaningful reality.

32. The failed WTO ministerial talks held in Geneva in July 2008 signalled, at best, a significant delay in the Doha negotiations. The progress made since has been only limited, especially in the agricultural negotiations so essential to a truly

[15] WTO, *World Trade Report 2009: Trade Policy Commitments and Contingency Measures* (Geneva, July 2009).

[16] UNCTAD data.

development-centred outcome. Yet, several major parties have recently reiterated their interest in pursuing the Doha round, and the necessary impetus at the political level to revive the Doha round appears to be gaining ground. Any such revival must be grounded in the need to put the developmental dimensions at the centre of the negotiations, in particular the principle of special and differential treatment and such practical measures as duty-free and quota-free treatment of all exports of the least developed countries. With one eye on history and one on the future, the current financial crisis makes the successful and speedy conclusion of a development-focused Doha round all the more urgent.

33. Protectionist surges in response to the current economic slowdown around the world highlight the importance of actions to ensure that the global trading system remains open to support the development efforts of all countries, particularly the poorer countries. It emphasizes once again the need for an early but development-oriented conclusion to the Doha development round.

Aid for trade and the trade financing gap

34. At the London Summit in April 2009, the leaders of the Group of Twenty agreed to the provision of additional trade financing support by multilateral development banks in the amount of $250 billion. While significant, this measure will only play one part in addressing a trade financing gap and needs to be implemented in concert with other actions, such as the scaling up of aid for trade, to ensure that practical advantage can be taken of market opportunities.

35. The World Trade Organization convened the second Global Review of Aid for Trade in Geneva on 6 and 7 July 2009. The review showed that aid-for-trade flows had grown annually by more than 10 per cent in real terms since 2005, bringing total new commitments to more than $25 billion in 2007, an increase of $4 billion. In addition, non-concessional loans added a further $27 billion to tackle binding supply-side constraints. Calculations by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) show that 9 of 10 commitments in aid-for-trade projects and programmes do generate actual activity.

36. In relation to the decline in the supply of trade finance, data on trends in export and import credits are not readily available, but many countries have reported problems in accessing various trade finance instruments. This has led to a compression of trade activity, reflected in the idling of container ships and a precipitous drop in shipping rates.

IV. Increasing international financial and technical cooperation for development

37. It is noteworthy that total net ODA from countries members of the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) rose in 2008 by 10.2 per cent in real terms to $119.8 billion, the highest dollar figure ever recorded, and reached 0.30 per cent of the combined gross national income (GNI) of donors. In particular, bilateral development projects and programmes rose by 12.5 per cent in real terms compared to 2007, indicating that donors are substantially scaling up their core aid programmes. Preliminary data for 2008 show that net bilateral ODA to Africa totalled $26 billion, of which $22.5 billion went to sub-Saharan Africa: an increase

of 10.6 per cent and 10 per cent, respectively, in real terms, excluding volatile debt relief grants. Among DAC member countries, the largest contributors in terms of gross ODA were the United States of America ($26.9 billion), Japan ($17.4 billion), Germany ($15.9 billion), France ($12.4 billion) and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland ($11.8 billion).

38. The total aid of the United States increased in 2008 by 16.8 per cent in real terms, compared with the decline of 9.9 per cent in 2007; its ODA share of GNI has now risen to 0.18 per cent. While United States aid increased to practically all regions, aid to sub-Saharan Africa rose sharply by 38.3 per cent in real terms, to $6.5 billion, and aid to the least developed countries rose by 40.5 per cent in real terms, to $6.9 billion. Thus, the promise of the United States to double aid to sub-Saharan Africa by 2010 appears to be on track. Japan also reversed the downward trend in its ODA, which had persisted since 2000, excluding 2005 and 2006 when high levels of debt relief occurred. The net ODA of Japan in 2008 was $9.4 billion, representing an increase of 8.2 per cent in real terms compared with 2007, when it fell by 30.1 per cent. The increase is mainly owing to a rise in contributions to international financial institutions. Japan had announced that it intends to fulfil its promise of an overall increase of $10 billion over 2005-2009.

39. The combined net ODA of the 15 countries members of DAC that are members of the European Union, which account for almost 60 per cent of all DAC ODA, also rose by 8.6 per cent in real terms, to $70.2 billion in 2008 compared to 2007, when it fell by 5.8 per cent in real terms. As a share of GNI, net ODA from those 15 countries rose from 0.40 per cent of their combined gross national product to 0.42 per cent in 2008. The United Kingdom, Spain, Germany, Canada, Belgium, Greece, Australia, New Zealand and Portugal also reported significant increases in their ODA in 2008.

40. There is a fear that the strain of the crisis may lead to donor countries cutting their aid efforts, including aid for trade, similar to the global economic recession of the early 1990s, which produced large fiscal deficits in donor countries that led to deep cuts in ODA, from 0.33 per cent of GNI in 1992 to 0.22 per cent in 1997. Estimates differ across donors but, according to a recent study, a 1 per cent negative growth shock implies an 8 per cent reduction in aid budgets five years afterwards. Such a reversal at the present juncture would place a dangerous additional burden on developing countries already struggling with restricted sources of income and increased poverty.

41. At various international meetings, including the special high-level meeting of the Economic and Social Council in April 2009 and the high-level meeting of DAC in May, many developed countries announced their determination not to permit their domestic financing difficulties to reduce their ODA flows and many indicated that they were seriously considering contributing to funds to mitigate the impact of the crisis on the most vulnerable populations.

V. External debt

42. While confined to a select group of countries, the international community has made notable progress in regard to debt relief. These efforts set out basic principles which can be applied in expanding international cooperation in dealing with debt distress, an activity which will become critical in the next few years. In adopting the

Doha Declaration in December 2008, the international community acknowledged the need to continue to address all relevant issues regarding external debt problems, including through the United Nations, and to consider ways to explore enhanced approaches of sovereign debt restructuring mechanisms based on existing frameworks and principles, with the broad participation of creditors and debtors and ensuring comparable burden-sharing among creditors, with an important role for the Bretton Woods institutions.[17]

43. Since the adoption of the Monterrey Consensus, the most important international actions in respect of external debt have been undertaken within the context of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative and the Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative. Substantial assistance in the amount of $117 billion (in nominal terms) has been committed to the post-decision point heavily indebted poor countries, mostly under the HIPC initiative but also including $49 billion under the Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative, amounting on average to about 50 per cent of their GDP in 2007. About one half of the funds is to be provided by bilateral creditors and the rest will come from multilateral lenders.

44. Of the 40 countries eligible or potentially eligible for assistance under the HIPC initiative, 24 have now reached their completion points and have received or are receiving irrevocable debt relief. In addition, 11 countries have reached their decision points and some are receiving interim debt relief. With respect to the Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative, about two thirds of the funds, or an additional $17.8 billion, have been delivered to the 24 post-completion point countries, with two thirds of the cost to be borne by the International Development Association (IDA).

45. With the onset of the global financial crisis, developing country external payments and fiscal balances have come under enormous stress. Many developing economies, including those that have benefited from debt relief initiatives, could fall into debt distress. External financing conditions have tightened, both from public and private sources. Escalating fiscal and financial pressures in both donor and recipient countries are exacerbating the challenges. In the context of reduced capital inflows and strains on the budgets of traditional external lenders, lower revenue and increased reliance on external financing to offset shortfalls in domestic resources constitute the main sources of fiscal stress. Additional fiscal pressures arise from currency depreciations and rising interest rates. All of these factors pose serious risks to the debt sustainability of developing countries and undermine their capacity to service or roll over external debt obligations.

46. For HIPC countries, debt levels are rising quickly and the thresholds set under the Debt Sustainability Framework of the Bretton Woods institutions are now being approached more rapidly. As a result, an increasing number of heavily indebted poor countries are at a higher risk of debt distress. The crisis is unmistakably reversing the progress that has been made under these schemes. In March 2009, IMF identified 28 countries with debt in excess of 60 per cent of GDP and its simulations suggest that another three countries could face debt ratios in excess of 60 per cent if they undertook additional borrowing to offset shortfalls in external financing, possibly leading to debt-related difficulties further down the road. IMF simulations of additional borrowing to offset the shortfalls in external financing suggest that at

[17] General Assembly resolution 63/239, annex, para. 67.

least 20 countries are on the verge of a high risk of debt distress.[18] On the assumption that countries will make up external financing shortfalls with public deficits, IMF estimates that this will cost up to 4 per cent of GDP in 2009 alone.

47. In early April 2009, leaders of the Group of Twenty announced a $1.1 trillion package to help countries to meet their immediate financial needs arising from the crisis and to boost worldwide economic activity. The bulk of the resources counted as part of the package comprised financing from programmes announced prior to the meeting of the Group. At the most, it is estimated that the poorest countries will have access to an additional $50 billion of these resources against a financing shortfall estimated at $165 billion.[19] To the extent that low-income countries are reaching the limit of rolling over scheduled debt-service payments or drawing down their reserves, the international community could consider a debt-service moratorium for low-income countries at no cost (no interest liabilities on delayed payments), as suggested by UNCTAD at the special high-level meeting of the Economic and Social Council in April, or a one-time special allocation of special drawing rights (SDRs) for low-income countries at a level appropriate to meet the financing shortfall and distributed according to population size, as proposed by the States Members of the United Nations that are members of the Group of 77 and China during the negotiations at the Conference on the World Financial and Economic Crisis and its Impact on Development, held in New York from 24 to 30 June 2009.[20]

48. In the period 2003-2007, at a time of abundant liquidity and low interest rates, the debt of middle-income countries from private sources surged. The availability of private debt has since declined precipitously as part of the deleveraging process in advanced countries. The contraction in international financial markets creates substantial fiscal risks which threaten macroeconomic stability in the middle-income countries, even though a few of the more prominent have built up cushions against the downturn in their international reserves. From the perspective of their creditors, these middle-income countries are facing difficulties in rolling over their external debt, particularly in respect of external corporate borrowing. Moreover, unlike low-income countries, the soundness of the domestic financial sectors of middle-income countries has deteriorated owing to an exposure to financial assets in advanced economies and the sectors require public resources to restore their health.

49. Middle-income countries with heavy debt obligations could be compelled to pursue more extensively both conventional options, such as debt restructuring, and more unconventional options, such as bilateral debt relief agreements and debt swaps, in order to manage the impending debt vulnerability. The cumulative effect of these efforts during a period of reconstruction of the international financial sector would increase the fragility of the global financial system and could extend the recovery time over uncertainties about the servicing of developing country debt obligations.

50. Target 15 of the Millennium Development Goals calls for dealing comprehensively with the debt problems of developing countries through national and international measures in order to make debt sustainable for all developing

[18] A country is considered at high risk of debt distress if the GDP and corresponding debt service relative to exports ratios exceed their respective thresholds.

[19] World Bank, *Global Monitoring Report 2009*.

[20] An SDR allocation would require amendment of the IMF Articles of Agreement.

countries in the long term. In the case of middle-income countries, urgent progress is needed to go beyond the individual country, case-by-case approaches to debt rescheduling and resolution which could become widespread within the next year and to establish more predictable, rules-based and equitable international mechanisms. Revisiting the effort to install a sovereign debt resolution mechanism, which was launched by IMF in 2002 but later suspended, would seem to be timely.

51. For the low-income countries, prospective debt difficulties will increase pressures to expand the coverage of existing approaches, improve the flexibility of the debt sustainability framework (as requested at the meeting of the Group of Twenty in April) and address the obstacles to funding expanded debt relief approaches that will restore the growth dynamics of the economy. IMF is reviewing its policy on debt limits to allow more flexible borrowing strategies while ensuring debt sustainability.

VI. Addressing systemic issues: enhancing the coherence and consistency of the international monetary, financial and trading systems in support of development

52. At the high-level meeting of the Economic and Social Council in April 2009, many speakers emphasized that the crisis had revealed major flaws in the financial sector and in financial regulation and supervision at both the global and national level. They also emphasized that to find a way out of the crisis, it would be necessary to restore confidence, ensure proper functioning of financial markets, achieve stricter oversight of such markets and reform the global financial system. Making rapid progress in strengthening the voice and participation of developing countries was deemed necessary to restore the legitimacy and effectiveness of institutions of global economic governance.[21]

Strengthening international financial regulation

53. A consensus is emerging that reforms must involve reshaping regulatory systems to identify and take account of macroprudential risks; expanding the perimeter of regulation and oversight to all systemically important financial institutions, instruments and markets; mitigating procyclicality in prudential regulation; strengthening capital and risk management; reorienting principles on executive remuneration to minimize reckless risk-taking; and improving standards on valuation and provisioning. In a financially integrated world with competing national financial centres in which financial companies can choose to locate specific activities in order to exploit regulatory advantage, these reforms will be successful only if coordinated internationally.

54. More advanced markets should bear a relatively greater burden in oversight and regulatory activities, especially over the risk-sharing features of internationally traded financial assets, so that smaller and less sophisticated markets do not have to

[21] Worth noting is the encyclical letter, *Caritas in Veritate* (Charity in Truth), issued by Pope Benedict XVI on 7 July 2009, which emphasizes, inter alia, the importance of giving poorer nations an effective voice in shared decision-making in the context of the economic crisis and called for reforms in the United Nations, economic institutions and international finance towards realizing the concept of the family of nations.

overregulate to protect the soundness of their own financial and currency markets, thereby sacrificing stronger access to international finance. Previous efforts to strengthen cooperation through the deliberations of the Financial Stability Forum, the Basle Committee on Banking Supervision and colleges of supervisors proved inadequate. The creation in April 2009 of the Financial Stability Board represents a positive step towards the establishment of a new institution that can potentially improve coordination in international financial regulation, even though its membership still does not include the developing countries most severely affected by the current crisis.

Increasing the stability and volume of global liquidity

55. The call of the Group of Twenty in April 2009 for a general SDR allocation by IMF equivalent to $250 billion is recognition by world leaders, for the first time since the early 1980s, of the need to boost significantly international liquidity using an international reserve unit. The cumulative total of SDR allocations was previously equivalent only to $21.4 billion. The ongoing financial crisis has sparked a discussion among world leaders of the deficiencies of the present international monetary system in which a national currency, the United States dollar, serves as a dominant source of international foreign exchange reserves. This issue was also the subject of discussion in the first summit meeting of the BRIC group of countries (Brazil, Russian Federation, India and China), held in Yekaterinburg, Russian Federation, in June 2009. Reforming a global reserve system so that it can provide a stable foundation to growing trade volumes and financing for development will require either supplementary disciplines on dollar emission and/or a purposeful evolution towards a truly global currency reserve system. Technically, it should be possible to move forward on a mix of both, recognizing the difficult political constraints that have to be overcome in making the progress needed in this critical matter.

Role of surveillance and managing global imbalances

56. Surveillance remains the key crisis prevention tool of IMF, but it is generally recognized that progress remains to be made in its design and implementation. Since it is indisputable that the global financial crisis requires global solutions, the world economy now more than ever needs a credible IMF with a governance structure which facilitates its role in promoting international economic stability and sound financial development, most particularly of developing countries, and which can exercise strong policy leadership.

57. Since the 1980s, IMF has mainly focused on problems in emerging markets and developing countries, devoting insufficient attention to major financial centres and vulnerabilities in global financial markets. The financial crisis underscores the need for the Fund to maintain a sharp focus on risks in all systemically important countries, especially the reserve currency-issuing countries, and their potential spillover effects. To close this gap, the IMF vulnerability exercise is being expanded to advanced economies and integrated with the early warning exercise to be conducted jointly with the Financial Stability Board. Much more progress is required in improving surveillance over the major financial markets, including the extent to which national authorities should take account of the impact of their policies on the global financial system.

58. Surveillance by IMF can only be effective to the extent that members are cooperative and responsive as regards the implementation of surveillance recommendations. In the case of the current crisis, there was a clear failure to act on the information made available by IMF. The challenge is to ensure that the relevant information is used proactively to prevent and mitigate future crises.

59. While the traditional emphasis of IMF has been on exchange rates, an area in which some progress had been made, the crisis has pushed macrofinancial and macroprudential issues into the centre stage in IMF surveillance. In this regard, IMF has taken steps to increase the attention given to financial risks, including asset price bubbles, leverage, risk concentration in large banks and hidden or off-balance sheet exposures. A key aspect here is the integration of macroeconomic and financial sector surveillance, the focus on the linkage between the macroeconomy and the financial markets, and the soundness of the financial sectors of member countries, particularly those that have a major impact on the global economy.

60. The primary long-term goal of enhanced surveillance must be to ensure the stability of the international monetary system, notably through the reduction of global imbalances. This can only be accomplished if countries enhance their coordination in fiscal and monetary policies, paying attention to challenges in shifting aggregate demand from deficit to surplus countries. This is why it is more than ever critical to build an effective framework for enhanced multilateral surveillance and policy coordination against the backdrop of the intended governance reform of IMF.

Lending activities of the International Monetary Fund

61. Amid the current financial market turmoil, the need for providing official liquidity has once again become the primary focus of Governments around the world. In its turn, since the onset of the crisis, IMF has been providing large-scale financing to countries experiencing a reduction in the availability of external funding. As of May 2009, IMF lending commitments reached a record level of $157 billion, including a sharp increase in concessional lending to low-income countries. An important characteristic of recent IMF lending arrangements has been their exceptionally large size in relation to country quotas.

62. Even though programmes initiated in 2008 have incorporated the customary public spending cutbacks, IMF has initiated an overhaul in its lending toolkit and conditionality framework to increase the effectiveness of its crisis prevention and resolution efforts. It has doubled all loan access limits, including for low-income countries, and the surcharge framework has been simplified. Two new facilities which are intended to provide contingency financing in large volumes have been put in place: the flexible credit line available to countries with a strong track record of macroeconomic management and which thus does not entail any ex post conditionality, and the high access precautionary arrangement. These changes are intended to make the overall lending framework more flexible and suited to the diverse needs of members, while remaining consistent with the original purpose of providing temporary financing for balance-of-payment difficulties. The changes require increased resources for IMF appropriate to the much larger volume of financial flows occurring in the world economy. The Group of Twenty and the International Monetary and Financial Committee of the IMF Board of Governors have agreed to triple the loanable resources of the Fund, through an increase in its

main standing borrowing arrangement (the New Arrangement to Borrow (NAB)) by up to $500 billion. Of these, about $415 billion have already been pledged by member countries.

VII. Staying engaged

63. The Follow-up International Conference on Financing for Development to Review the Implementation of the Monterrey Consensus, held in Doha from 29 November to 2 December 2008 and chaired by His Highness the Emir of Qatar, consisted of seven plenary meetings and six multi-stakeholder round tables on the major thematic areas of the Monterrey Consensus. Some 40 Heads of State or Government, 9 Deputy Heads of State or Government, 50 ministers and 17 vice-ministers of foreign affairs, finance, development cooperation and trade, and other high-level officials from 170 States, as well as representatives of all relevant stakeholders, participated in the Conference. The Conference adopted the Doha Declaration on Financing for Development, which was endorsed by the General Assembly in resolution 63/239.

64. The overall theme of the special high-level meeting of the Economic and Social Council with the Bretton Woods institutions, WTO and UNCTAD was "Coherence, coordination and cooperation in the context of the implementation of the Monterrey Consensus and the Doha Declaration on Financing for Development". The two sub-themes of the plenary debates were: (a) addressing the impact of the global financial and economic crisis on development, including issues related to the international financial and monetary architecture and global governance structures; and (b) strengthening of the intergovernmental inclusive process to carry out the financing for development follow-up.

65. As called for in paragraph 89 of the Doha Declaration, the Economic and Social Council, at its high-level meeting, considered the need for a strengthened and more effective intergovernmental inclusive process to carry out the financing for development follow-up. At its substantive session of 2009, the Council, in resolution 2009/30, recommended a number of changes in modalities for a strengthened and more effective multi-stakeholder intergovernmental process to implement the follow-up on financing for development:

(a) The duration of the special high-level spring meeting of the Council with the international financial and trade institutions could last for up to two days and should be timed appropriately, at least five weeks before the spring meetings of the Bretton Woods institutions. Discussions at the first segment of the high-level meeting would concentrate on a topic of current interest and the second segment would be organized under the overall theme of "Coherence, coordination and cooperation in the context of the implementation of the Monterrey Consensus and the Doha Declaration on Financing for Development";

(b) Consideration of the agenda item on financing for development should be allotted up to two full days during the annual substantive session of the Council, when it should normally adopt a substantive resolution;

(c) The General Assembly should give more prominence to its annual agenda item entitled "Follow-up to and implementation of the outcome of the 2002 International Conference on Financing for Development and the 2008 Review

Conference". A programme of multi-stakeholder consultations, including civil society and the private sector, could be reinitiated by the Financing for Development Office of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat.

66. The Conference on the World Financial and Economic Crisis and Its Impact on Development, held in New York from 24 to 30 June 2009, consisted of six plenary meetings and four interactive round tables. The Conference adopted an intergovernmentally agreed outcome document[22] which called for, inter alia, increased multilateral resources with an emphasis on grants and non-debt-creating finance for developing countries, the consideration of debt standstills and legitimate trade defence measures for countries facing balance-of-payment difficulties, recognition of the potential of SDRs in providing international liquidity, improvement of the transparency of the global financial system to deter illicit financial flows, strengthening of mechanisms for global economic monitoring and coordination, and further development of and support for the comprehensive crisis response of the United Nations development system.

67. In the outcome document, the General Assembly was invited to set up an ad hoc open-ended working group to follow up on the issues contained in that document, and the Economic and Social Council was requested to consider and make recommendations to the General Assembly on a number of matters. In response, on 31 July 2009, the General Assembly formally established the working group, and the Council, by decision 2009/258, requested the Secretariat to provide detailed reports on a number of issues by 15 September, with a view to reviewing the progress made in the consideration of those issues at its resumed substantive session of 2009.

[22] General Assembly resolution 63/303, annex.

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Sixty-fourth session
Item 32 of the provisional agenda*
United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

Persons displaced as a result of the June 1967 and subsequent hostilities

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

In its resolution 63/92, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report to it, after consulting with the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), on the progress made in the implementation of the resolution.

The present report refers to correspondence between the Secretary-General and the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations regarding actions taken by the Government of Israel in implementing the relevant provisions of that resolution. It also presents the information made available by the Commissioner-General of UNRWA to the Secretary-General on the return of refugees registered with the Agency to the West Bank and the Gaza Strip from Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic.

* A/64/150.

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Please recycle

1. The present report is submitted to the General Assembly pursuant to paragraph 5 of its resolution 63/92, entitled "Persons displaced as a result of the June 1967 and subsequent hostilities", the operative part of which reads:

> *The General Assembly,*
>
> 1. *Reaffirms* the right of all persons displaced as a result of the June 1967 and subsequent hostilities to return to their homes or former places of residence in the territories occupied by Israel since 1967;
>
> 2. *Expresses deep concern* that the mechanism agreed upon by the parties in article XII of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements of 13 September 1993 on the return of displaced persons has not been complied with, and stresses the necessity for an accelerated return of displaced persons;
>
> 3. *Endorses*, in the meanwhile, the efforts of the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East to continue to provide humanitarian assistance, as far as practicable, on an emergency basis, and as a temporary measure, to persons in the area who are currently displaced and in serious need of continued assistance as a result of the June 1967 and subsequent hostilities;
>
> 4. *Strongly appeals* to all Governments and to organizations and individuals to contribute generously to the Agency and to the other intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations concerned for the above-mentioned purposes;
>
> 5. *Requests* the Secretary-General, after consulting with the Commissioner-General, to report to the General Assembly before its sixty-fourth session on the progress made with regard to the implementation of the present resolution.

2. On 30 April 2009, the Secretary-General addressed notes verbales to the Permanent Representatives of Member States, including the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations, in which he drew attention to his reporting responsibility under the resolution and requested the Permanent Representative to inform him of any action his Government had taken or envisaged taking in implementation of the relevant provisions of the resolution.

3. In a note verbale dated 5 August 2009, the Permanent Representative of Israel replied as follows:

> The Permanent Mission of Israel to the United Nations presents its compliments to the Secretary-General of the United Nations and has the honour to refer to the latter's note, dated 30 April 2009, concerning resolutions adopted by the General Assembly under agenda item "United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East".
>
> While Israel voted against these resolutions, as it has done on similar resolutions adopted in the past by the General Assembly, the Permanent Mission wishes to reiterate Israel's support for UNRWA's humanitarian activities. In this respect, Israel reaffirms its intention to continue facilitating UNRWA's extension of vital humanitarian services to its beneficiaries in the field.

Over recent weeks and months, Israel has substantially eased the security-related restrictions in the West Bank, dismantling two thirds (27 of 41) of the formerly existing checkpoints and some 140 dirt roadblocks during the past year. These positive developments, noted with approval by the Quartet Envoy, have resulted in a marked improvement in economic indicators in the West Bank. Also, Israel continues to facilitate the entry of large quantities of humanitarian supplies into Gaza. Between the June 2007 Hamas takeover of Gaza and September 2008, 35,542 trucks bearing 813,870 tons of humanitarian supplies entered Gaza through the crossings from Israel. Similarly large quantities of supplies continue to enter Gaza through the crossings on an ongoing basis, with over 408,014 tons of aid and 55,034 million litres of fuel delivered to Gaza between January and July 2009.

Despite Israel's ongoing commitment to the bilateral negotiations with the Palestinian Authority during 2008, Palestinian terrorism has continued unabated and remains an alarming reality. Since 2001, over 8,900 rockets and mortars have been fired at Israel from Gaza, over 3,100 of which were fired during 2008. This campaign of violence has not been limited to rocket fire from Gaza. In five separate incidents during 2008, Palestinian terrorists based in the West Bank carried out terror attacks, killing 12 and wounding dozens of Israeli civilians. Troublingly, none of the above is mentioned in any of the aforementioned resolutions.

Notwithstanding its support for UNRWA's humanitarian activities, Israel remains concerned by the political motivation of the aforesaid resolutions, and is disturbed by the fact that they present a one-sided view which fails to reflect the reality on the ground. Moreover, Israel's concern in this respect extends to many of the public statements of UNRWA officials which are clearly political and one-sided in tone. As a professional, humanitarian body, UNRWA must be vigilant in avoiding references to controversial matters of a political nature.

Israel favours a consolidation of UNRWA resolutions, and a removal of all extraneous political language. Moreover, Israel urges the Secretary-General and UNRWA to consider, together with the concerned parties, ways in which the United Nations can enhance the manner in which it advances the welfare of the Palestinian People.

In this respect, Israel favours an application in the Palestinian context of the standard principles guiding the United Nations with respect to treatment of refugees. Specifically, UNRWA's mandate should be such that entitlement to its services will be defined in a manner consistent with the standard United Nations policy on this matter. Furthermore, UNRWA's mandate should include the active promotion in the Palestinian context of the broadly applied United Nations goals of resettlement and local integration of refugees.

The annual General Assembly resolutions on UNRWA represent a politically motivated departure from the standard United Nations policy on refugee matters.

This politicization of a strictly humanitarian issue has exacerbated the situation of the Palestinian refugees by preventing practical solutions to their needs, such as have been successfully implemented with respect to numerous groups of refugees around the world. Israel urges the Secretary-General to use

his good offices to promote such changes in these resolutions as will ensure that the mandate of UNRWA is consistent with the general principles guiding United Nations policy on refugees.

4. In connection with paragraph 2 of General Assembly resolution 63/92, the Secretary-General has obtained from the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) the information available to her on the return of refugees registered with the Agency. As indicated in previous reports on the subject, the Agency is not involved in any arrangements for the return of refugees, nor is it involved in any arrangements for the return of displaced persons who are not registered as refugees. Its information is based on requests by returning registered refugees for transfer of their UNRWA registration records from Jordan, Lebanon or the Syrian Arab Republic to the areas to which they have returned. The Agency would not necessarily be aware of the return of any registered refugees who did not request the transfer of their registration records. So far as is known to the Agency, from 1 July 2008 to 30 June 2009, 1,162 refugees registered with UNRWA returned to the West Bank and 901 to the Gaza Strip from places outside the occupied Palestinian territory. It should be noted that some of these may not have been displaced in 1967 but may have been displaced in earlier or later years or may be members of the family of a displaced registered refugee. Thus, taking into account the estimate given in paragraph 4 of the previous report (A/63/315), the number of displaced registered refugees who are known by the Agency to have returned to the occupied territories since June 1967 is about 32,626. The Agency is unable to estimate the total number of displaced inhabitants who have returned. It keeps records only of registered refugees and, as noted above, even those records, particularly with respect to the location of registered refugees, may be incomplete.

5. In connection with paragraph 3 of General Assembly resolution 63/92, the Secretary-General refers to the report of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA for the period from 1 January to 31 December 2008 (A/64/13) and to the previous reports of the Commissioner-General for accounts of the continuous and ongoing assistance provided by UNRWA to persons displaced and in need of continued assistance.

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United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

Palestine refugees' properties and their revenues

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

On 30 April 2009, the Secretary-General sent notes verbales to Israel and all other Member States, drawing their attention to the relevant provisions of General Assembly resolutions 63/91 to 63/94 and requesting information by 10 July 2009 concerning any action taken or envisaged in relation to the implementation of those resolutions. A reply dated 5 August 2009 was received from Israel responding to the request contained in paragraph 4 of resolution 63/94. The full text of the reply is reproduced in the present report. No information has been received from any other Member State regarding the implementation of resolution 63/94.

* A/64/150.

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Please recycle

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to paragraph 6 of General Assembly resolution 63/94, on Palestine refugees' properties and their revenues.

2. In a note verbale dated 30 April 2009, the Secretary-General drew the attention of the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations to General Assembly resolutions 63/91 to 63/94, all of 5 December 2008, with the request that the Permanent Representative inform him by 10 July 2009 of any steps her Government had taken or envisaged taking in implementation of the relevant provisions of the resolutions.

3. Also on 30 April 2009, the Secretary-General sent a note verbale to all other Member States, drawing their attention to the relevant provisions of resolutions 63/91 to 63/94 and requesting information by 10 July 2009 on any actions taken or envisaged in relation to their implementation.

4. A reply dated 5 August 2009 was received from Israel responding to the request contained in paragraph 4 of General Assembly resolution 63/94. The text read as follows:

> While Israel voted against these resolutions, as it has done on similar resolutions adopted in the past by the General Assembly, Israel wishes to reiterate its support for the humanitarian activities of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). In this respect, Israel reaffirms its intention to continue facilitating UNRWA's extension of vital humanitarian services to its beneficiaries in the field.
>
> Over recent weeks and months, Israel has substantially eased the security-related restrictions in the West Bank, dismantling two thirds (27 of 41) of the formerly existing checkpoints and some 140 dirt roadblocks during the past year. These positive developments, noted with approval by the Quartet Envoy, have resulted in a marked improvement in economic indicators in the West Bank. Also, Israel continues to facilitate the entry of large quantities of humanitarian supplies into Gaza. Between the June 2007 Hamas takeover of Gaza and September 2008, 35,542 trucks bearing 813,870 tons of humanitarian supplies entered Gaza through the crossings from Israel. Similarly large quantities of supplies continue to enter Gaza through the crossings on an ongoing basis, with over 408,014 tons of aid and 55,034 million litres of fuel delivered to Gaza between January and July 2009.
>
> Despite Israel's ongoing commitment to the bilateral negotiations with the Palestinian Authority during 2008, Palestinian terrorism has continued unabated and remains an alarming reality. Since 2001, over 8,900 rockets and mortars have been fired at Israel from Gaza, over 3,100 of which were fired during 2008. This campaign of violence has not been limited to rocket fire from Gaza. In five separate incidents during 2008, Palestinian terrorists based in the West Bank carried out terror attacks, killing 12 and wounding dozens of Israeli civilians. Troublingly, none of the above is mentioned in any of the aforementioned resolutions.
>
> Notwithstanding its support for UNRWA's humanitarian activities, Israel remains concerned by the political motivation of the aforesaid resolutions, and is disturbed by the fact that they present a one-sided view which fails to reflect the reality on the ground. Moreover, Israel's concern in this respect extends to many of the public statements of UNRWA officials which are clearly political

and one-sided in tone. As a professional, humanitarian body, UNRWA must be vigilant in avoiding references to controversial matters of a political nature.

Israel favours a consolidation of UNRWA resolutions and a removal of all extraneous political language. Moreover, Israel urges the Secretary-General and UNRWA to consider, together with the concerned parties, ways in which the United Nations can enhance the manner in which it advances the welfare of the Palestinian People.

In this respect, Israel favours an application in the Palestinian context of the standard principles guiding the United Nations with respect to treatment of refugees. Specifically, UNRWA's mandate should be such that entitlement to its services will be defined in a manner consistent with the standard United Nations policy on this matter. Furthermore, UNRWA's mandate should include the active promotion in the Palestinian context of the broadly applied United Nations goals of resettlement and local integration of refugees.

The annual General Assembly resolutions on UNRWA represent a politically motivated departure from the standard United Nations policy on refugee matters. This politicization of a strictly humanitarian issue has exacerbated the situation of the Palestinian refugees by preventing practical solutions to their needs, such as have been successfully implemented with respect to numerous groups of refugees around the world. Israel urges the Secretary-General to use his good offices to promote such changes in these resolutions as will ensure that the mandate of UNRWA is consistent with the general principles guiding United Nations policy on refugees.

5. No information has been received from any other Member State with regard to the request contained in paragraph 4 of General Assembly resolution 63/94.

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Culture of peace

Interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report highlights the activities carried out by key United Nations entities involved in the field of interreligious and intercultural dialogue and in the implementation of General Assembly resolution 63/22 and also provides an overview of other major regional and global initiatives taken in this field. It presents the outcome of consultations carried out by the Secretariat, in coordination with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), on the possibility of proclaiming a United Nations decade for interreligious and intercultural dialogue. The report should be read in conjunction with the annual progress report of the Director-General of UNESCO on the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World, 2001-2010.

* A/64/150.

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Please recycle

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted in pursuance of General Assembly resolution 63/22, entitled "Promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace". It sets out the main activities carried out by the United Nations system in support of interreligious and intercultural dialogue since the adoption of the resolution and provides an overview of other major regional and international events in this field. The report also provides information on the outcome of the consultations carried out by the Secretariat, in coordination with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), on the possibility of proclaiming a United Nations decade for interreligious and intercultural dialogue, in pursuance of the same resolution.

II. Activities carried out by the United Nations system in support of interreligious and intercultural dialogue

A. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

2. Further to UNESCO resolution 34 C/46 adopted by the General Conference at its thirty-fourth session (16 October-3 November 2007) in which the General Conference expressed the hope that 2010 would be proclaimed the international year for the rapprochement of cultures, and the two related resolutions adopted by the General Assembly, 62/90 and 63/22, the UNESCO Executive Board, by its decision 181 EX/Decision 52, adopted in April 2009, invited the Director-General to elaborate an action plan to prepare the celebration of the year and called upon all Member States to contribute extrabudgetary resources to fund the action plan.

3. Accordingly, the Director-General sent a circular letter on 15 May 2009 to all Member States, intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations having official status at UNESCO as well as to other privileged partners inviting them to take part in the activities planned for the year. They were asked, in particular, to contribute to the drafting of the action plan, which should have a dual objective: to raise the awareness of the international community of the virtues of diversity and intercultural dialogue, using specific examples to show that all cultures and civilizations derive from and feed into each other; and to fight for human rights and against new forms of racism and discrimination. Attention was drawn to the fact that the plan should:

(a) Adopt a holistic approach incorporating those of other agencies in the United Nations system, States and intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs);

(b) Take advantage of the experience of UNESCO in the field;

(c) Promote positive examples and original projects, in particular on the occasion of political and cultural events, at the national, regional and international levels;

(d) Launch an appeal to raise extrabudgetary funds to finance relevant projects.

4. A draft of the action plan will be considered by the UNESCO Executive Board at its 182nd session, in September 2009, and by the General Conference at its thirty-fifth session, in October 2009. The exercise is coordinated by the UNESCO Culture Sector, in close cooperation with the other programme sectors — Education, Natural Sciences, Social and Human Sciences, Communication and Information — thus ensuring the necessary intersectoral approach.

5. In the area of interreligious dialogue, recent and ongoing UNESCO activities include:

(a) The annual meeting of the University Twinning (UNITWIN)/UNESCO Network of Chairs on Interreligious Dialogue for Intercultural Understanding, held in Oregon, United States of America, from 9 to 12 May 2009;

(b) A workshop on the theme "Christianity and Islam in the context of the contemporary culture", on 2 and 3 June 2009, by the UNESCO Chair in Comparative Studies of Spiritual Traditions, their Specific Cultures and Interreligious Dialogue, Saint Petersburg, Russian Federation, in partnership with the UNESCO Chair for the Comparative Study of Religions, Mediation and Dialogue at St. Joseph University, Beirut, with the support of the UNESCO office in Moscow and Beirut;

(c) A seminar on interreligious dialogue and spiritual traditions, held at the UNESCO office in Dakar on 8 and 9 June 2009;

(d) High-level participation (Chairperson of the UNESCO Executive Board) in the third Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions in Astana, 1 and 2 July 2009;

(e) The preparation of a study by an interregional and interfaith youth team, coordinated by Arigatou International under the overall supervision of UNESCO, with a view to engaging new voices in dialogue about religious issues. The study, to be submitted in November 2009, will identify existing practices for interfaith dialogue by and for youth. A similar study is under way to identify practices in the area of interfaith dialogue by and for women in East Africa. The scope of this research on women will be extended to other regions in 2010;

(f) A youth workshop, as a side event of the Parliament for World's Religions foreseen in December 2009 in Melbourne, Australia. The workshop will discuss Arigatou International's report on youth practices in interfaith dialogue and enable the drafting of a plan of action for the reinforcement of youth leadership for interfaith dialogue.

B. Alliance of civilizations

6. During the process under review, one of the key priorities of the Alliance was to ensure the success of the Second Forum of the Alliance, convened in April 2009 in Istanbul at the invitation of the Turkish Government, and to provide a mechanism for implementing the projects that were launched at the Madrid Forum.

7. Significant efforts were made towards consolidating the Alliance's three pillars — Governments, international organizations and civil society — and reinforcing its main building blocks. The steady enlargement and consolidation of the Group of Friends and the development of a global network of civil society

organizations allowed the Alliance to advance its objectives in three main directions, namely the inclusion of the Alliance's goals in national agendas through the implementation of national plans for intercultural dialogue, incorporating the Alliance into regional processes to create synergies and leverage work already under way and engaging civil society in joint activities under the auspices or the lead of the Alliance.

8. Support for the Alliance of Civilizations continued to grow significantly with an increase of 21 per cent in membership, thus bringing the number of members of the Group of Friends from 85 to 103. At the encouragement of High Representative, Jorge Sampaio, members of the Group of Friends have appointed focal points mandated with overseeing the implementation of national plans and coordinating with the Alliance secretariat. Since the beginning of the reporting period, 69 focal points have been appointed by countries and 14 by international organizations. At the Istanbul Forum, 10 countries announced their national plans: Albania, Algeria, Argentina, Brazil, Montenegro, Portugal, Qatar, Romania, the Russian Federation and Slovenia.

9. The Alliance continued to expand and deepen its network of partners. At the Istanbul Forum, the Alliance signed new agreements with seven international organizations with a view to leveraging networks and competitive advantage with its partners. The Alliance further established platforms for cooperation with two important constituencies: foundations and the private sector. Following a commitment made in Madrid, the group decided to create an international network of foundations. With regard to the private sector, the Alliance partnered with the United Nations Global Compact to launch a publication on the innovative role played by the business sector in managing cross-cultural diversity in the workplace and across communities, entitled "Doing business in a multicultural world: challenges and opportunities".

10. The Alliance also focused its efforts on implementing and consolidating programmes and projects that were launched at the Madrid Forum in January 2008 as well as on new initiatives that have been developed since then. The following review briefly describes initiatives including those in which the Alliance has a lead implementing role as well as those where it acts as a facilitator.

11. The Alliance's rapid response media mechanism was launched at the Madrid Forum. On average, between three to four news releases are sent per month to a constantly growing list of media contacts (currently over 7,000) to alert journalists about intercultural-related issues they might want to cover and offering names of experts prepared to comment on these issues. A partnership was developed with the European Commission and the Anna Lindh Foundation to develop a network of experts in the Euro-Mediterranean region to support the work of media professionals covering intercultural tensions and conflicts in this region.

12. Progress continued on the development of the Alliance's Media Literacy Education Clearinghouse (aocmedialiteracy.org), a comprehensive online database of organizations, resources and best practices that help combat cultural stereotypes and develop critical thinking skills to evaluate media messages, which has become an internationally recognized portal, with over 16,000 hits per month. In addition, the construction of the Education about Religions and Beliefs Clearinghouse has been completed (aocerb.org). This online resource provides access to guidelines and other educational resources about the world's diverse religions and beliefs as well as

education to ethics, tolerance and citizenship. In parallel to that work, a Research Network is being developed by the Alliance, bringing together a small group of institutions from around the world that are committed to encouraging cross-cultural educational exchanges.

13. Preparatory work was also conducted in early 2009 on an Alliance Fellowship Programme, designed to facilitate exposure of emerging leaders from North America, Europe, and Muslim-majority countries to media, culture, politics, institutions, civil society and religion to one another's countries. The project, which was announced in Istanbul, will become operational in the second half of 2009.

14. The pilot phase of the Youth Solidarity Fund was carried out as planned. Seed funding was provided to outstanding youth-led initiatives that promote long-term constructive relationships between young people from diverse cultural backgrounds. After analysis of the lessons learned, the next phase of the programme should be launched on a wider scale in late 2009. In collaboration with youth partners, the Alliance developed a youth strategy, which includes a series of initiatives led by the Alliance on the contribution of youth to advancing cross-cultural understanding. Launched at the Istanbul Forum, the Global Youth Movement of the Alliance aims to mobilize youth organizations and individuals and to strengthen commitment to the principles and activities of the Alliance. Moreover, construction of the youth website has been completed.

15. In the area of migration, which constitutes the fourth area of work identified in the report of the high-level group, preliminary plans have been drawn up for a migration-integration clearinghouse, in collaboration with the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Plural+, a youth-produced video festival on migration, inclusiveness, identity and diversity, was also launched with IOM and other partners at the Istanbul Forum.

16. Announced at the Madrid Forum, the Silatech ("Your connection") youth employment project, an initiative of Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al Thani and Sheikha Mozah bint Nasser Al-Missned of Qatar, is now fully operational. The project has established alliances with partners to promote job creation and enterprise development.

17. In Istanbul, the Alliance of Civilizations media fund, a related yet autonomous project, unveiled its three-part strategy, which includes conducting research to increase understanding of the impact of media on attitudes; raising awareness on the research findings through a global media-industry-targeted campaign; and producing and distributing content in film, television and new media that promote cross-cultural understanding.

18. In collaboration with the Alliance, Cisco Systems, Inc., launched a "Dialogue café" at the Istanbul Forum. Dialogue café links diverse groups of citizens from around the world through third-generation videoconferencing technology, thereby creating a new space for social innovation at the global level.

19. In the wake of the Gaza crisis, a cluster of projects was jointly developed by the Alliance and partner organizations. Named "Restore Trust, Rebuild Bridges", the initiative sets out a series of joint actions aimed at helping to restore trust in Euro-Mediterranean dialogue and to rebuild human and cultural bridges among societies in the region. The initiative, which involves the Anna Lindh Foundation, UNESCO, the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), the Council of

Europe, the European Commission and the Mediterranean Universities Union (UNIMED), among others, has received the support of several Governments.

20. Finally, the Second Forum mobilized a wide range of committed partners, from international organizations to the media. On 6 and 7 April 2009, more than 1,500 participants, among them several Heads of Government, over 50 Ministers and policymakers, foundations, media and grass-roots leaders from around the world, convened in Istanbul to forge new partnerships and generate ideas aimed at building trust and cooperation among diverse communities. The Forum also served as an opportunity to take stock of initiatives developed by the Alliance and to launch practical projects in collaboration with civil society and corporate partners. It included a "Marketplace of ideas", featuring some of the world's most exciting, innovative and lesser-known civil society projects aimed at advancing intercultural understanding.

21. The next forums of the Alliance will be held in Brazil, in May 2010, in Qatar, in 2011, and Austria, in 2012.

C. United Nations University

22. A research project conducted jointly by the United Nations University and the International Peace Research Institute, Oslo, resulted in the recent publication entitled "*World Religions and Norms of War*". The book examines religious teachings concerning the questions of when war can be justified and what methods and targets are permissible during war. It traces the evolution within the major world religions of attitudes and teachings related to the ethics of war, systematically exploring the historical roots and interpretations of norms within these traditions and linking them to the challenges of modern warfare. This reveals both harmonies and distinctions between the traditions, as well as the internal debates within each tradition, as they have responded to pressing moral challenges such as offensive and defensive war, the protection of non-combatants, asymmetric tactics, terrorism and weapons of mass destruction. The book was launched with a series of well-attended events at United Nations Headquarters in New York, the United States Institute of Peace in Washington, D.C., as well as in London and Oxford, where speakers included Archbishop Migliore, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations, and Dr. Bawa Jain, Secretary-General of the World Council of Religious Leaders. The book has been very well received by the academic, religious and policy communities, with over 400 copies sold in the first few weeks of publication.

23. The United Nations University and the University of Alberta, Canada, have organized an international conference entitled "Towards the Dignity of Difference: Neither the Clash of Civilizations nor the End of History", which is to be held on 3 and 4 October 2009. Distinguished participants include Tariq Ali, Benjamin Barber, Hamid Dabashi, Robert Cox and Hassan Hanafi. The conference will initiate a three-year research project, which is to result in an edited book and a special issue of a major academic journal. The project aims to examine the recent impacts and implications of the Western-centric discourse represented in Samuel Huntington's "Clash of Civilizations" and Francis Fukuyama's "End of History" theses. It also tackles the problem of radical extremism and counter-extremist strategies led by the United States by explaining the need for an alternative approach, a third way, that acknowledges the "dignity of difference" and promotes "dialogue among

civilizations". The project aims to challenge mainstream and ethnocentric discourse, to review current policy responses to radical extremism and to examine what the "dignity of difference" means in foreign policy terms.

24. The United Nations University and the University of Notre Dame, United States, have initiated a joint project on "Holy sites and ownership of religious property", with workshops in Rome (December 2008) and Jerusalem (December 2009). The project explores issues of religious property and visiting rights to holy sites through case studies on areas, including the Balkans, Jerusalem and the Vatican. Cooperation with UNESCO will be sought to disseminate the project outputs, including an edited book providing recommendations for potential amendments to national legislations.

D. United Nations Population Fund

25. During the period under review, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) accomplished significant strides in the mobilization and consolidation of regional interfaith networks for population and development. The UNFPA Global Forum on Faith-based Organizations for Population and Development (Istanbul, 20-21 October 2008), which brought together over 160 faith-based organizations and religious leaders from all major faiths and regions from over 50 countries, was a major contribution in the area of advocacy for the Millennium Development Goals and the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development. The theme of the consultations was the enhancement of the partnerships between faith-based organizations and UNFPA in areas of reproductive health, gender equality and population and development.

26. The Global Forum also drew together key partners from faith-based organizations from four earlier regional consultations on enhancing partnerships, held in Durban, South Africa, Kuala Lumpur, Cairo and Buenos Aires. The Forum culminated in the launch of the Global Interfaith Network on Population and Development, as leaders and grass-roots health-service organizations of Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and Sikh communities affirmed their common commitment to strengthen cooperation on human rights and development. The members of the Network are distinguished by the range of health services they provide to communities (in some instances, estimated to be between 30 to 65 per cent of basic health care), but also by their commitment to human rights and dignity. In Istanbul, members agreed on a terms of partnership with UNFPA, in what is termed the Istanbul Consensus.

27. Since the launch of the Interfaith Network, UNFPA has continued to amass lessons learned from its ongoing partnerships with faith-based organizations. African and Asia-Pacific regional interfaith networks have carried out a number of activities with UNFPA country offices on maternal health, census and migration issues. The UNFPA office in Guatemala has partnered with Georgetown University to map the role of faith-based organizations in the Latin American and Caribbean region's socio-economic development.

28. Bearing in mind the critical nature of the partnerships with the faith-based sector, and the complexities and specificities thereof, UNFPA produced a policy guidance note on engaging faith-based organizations as agents of change, which lays out the rationale, principles and terms of such partnerships. The guidance note was

sent to all 119 UNFPA country offices and shared with the focal points of faith-based organizations in related United Nations agencies.

29. The UNFPA flagship publication, *State of World Population 2008*, focused on intercultural approaches to development work. Entitled *Reaching Common Ground: Culture, Gender and Human Rights*, the report argues that culture is and always has been central to development and provides experiential insights for practitioners seeking "cultural fluency".

30. Another UNFPA publication, *Culture Matters: Lessons from a Legacy of Engaging Faith-Based Organizations*, maps partnerships at the national and regional levels between UNFPA and faith-based organizations in the areas of population and development and provides an analysis of best practices and lessons learned, including an annotated list of key resources in the broader culture and development field.

31. UNFPA, with the support of the Swiss Development Agency, also produced a training manual on culturally sensitive approaches to development programming, linked to the human rights-based approach, with a particular focus on gender equality. The manual constituted the basis for capacity-building training workshops for five United Nations country teams, in Jordan, Iraq, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Bangladesh and Brazil.

32. A set of sociocultural development indicators have been commissioned, which are relevant to the UNFPA strategic mandate. The indicators, designed according to UNFPA's 2008-2011 strategic plan, will be assessed in terms of their viability as part of UNFPA's overall monitoring and evaluation strategy and commitment to results-based management.

33. UNFPA also continued to take a lead role in facilitating and convening the informal inter-agency task force on faith-based organizations (including the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNESCO, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and UN-Habitat). The task force, which had earlier agreed to consult on ongoing partnerships with faith-based organizations, will assign members to speak to these respective groups during the Parliament of World Religions in Melbourne, Australia, in December 2009.

34. In May 2009, UNFPA participated in the first in-depth dialogue hosted by the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues to present its work with and in support of indigenous people and ethnic minorities in Latin America, the Caribbean and Asia, and to receive inputs from the Forum on how UNFPA should proceed programmatically in favour of these populations. UNFPA also organized two side events during the session.

35. On 3 and 4 August 2009, UNFPA convened international faith-based service providers for a policy round table in New York, the objectives of which were to provide an update on developments since the Istanbul launch of the Interfaith Network, to discuss and prioritize key recommendations for action and to agree on joint activities and modalities of engagement for 2009-2011. On 5 August 2009, UNFPA hosted a second meeting of the informal inter-agency task force on faith-based organizations to discuss possible joint efforts for follow-up on the

recommendations on partnerships with the United Nations made at the policy round table.

36. UNFPA continues to support several civil society initiatives, to endorse North-South collaboration among women of faith, to integrate efforts and to build bridges with non-faith-based development and human rights actors, aimed at advancing a culture of peace.

37. At the regional level, in September 2009, UNFPA will convene a regional consultation of faith-based organizations in Belarus, focused on Eastern Europe and Central Asia, where its fifth regional interfaith network will be launched. A mapping of faith-based organizations in the region is currently under way to analyse the support and position of faith-based organizations on various issues relevant to UNFPA. In October, UNFPA will conduct, with the Commonwealth Secretariat, a regional capacity-building training workshop on human rights for African faith-based organizations and traditional leaders in the United Republic of Tanzania.

38. At the country level, the UNFPA office in Lebanon will be conducting a mapping of all the faith-based organizations concerned with developmental programmes focusing primarily on youth, women, gender equality and reproductive health/HIV/AIDS-related areas. The UNFPA country office in the Republic of Moldova will also be collaborating with IOM on a joint initiative with the Alliance of Civilization, and others, around a youth festival on the theme of "migration, diversity, and identity".

39. By December 2009, UNFPA anticipates the production of several culturally relevant knowledge tools, including reports of the regional forums of faith-based organizations, the sociocultural development indicators and the results of a pioneering research on sociocultural factors which can positively influence the demand of sexual and reproductive health services.

E. Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS

40. UNAIDS has continued to promote interreligious dialogue through its work with faith-based organizations aimed at supporting a broad range of activities in partnership with people living with HIV. Global faith communities reach many millions of believers, and leaders of faith communities can therefore be particularly influential in speaking out responsibly about HIV. Through a network of partnerships and advisers, UNAIDS works to support the engagement of religious leaders and faith-based organizations in the AIDS response in over 70 countries.

41. In 2008, UNAIDS, in collaboration with UNFPA, hosted an initial consultation, including representatives from faith communities, people living with HIV and staff of the UNAIDS secretariat and co-sponsor partnerships, to develop a draft UNAIDS strategic framework for the engagement of religion and faith-based organizations in the response to HIV. This framework will be finalized in 2009 in line with the "Joint action for results: UNAIDS outcome framework for 2009-2011" and will guide the work of UNAIDS co-sponsors in scaling up partnership action with faith-based organizations to achieve universal access to HIV prevention, treatment care and support services in 2010.

42. In August 2008, UNAIDS engaged in an ecumenical pre-conference in Mexico City, D. F., ahead of the International AIDS Conference. UNAIDS led a workshop

for faith-based organizations in collaboration with the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance to develop strategic approaches to engaging faith-based organizations in the response to HIV. One practical outcome of the partnership with the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance in 2009 was a theological consultation on HIV prevention, resulting in the publication by the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance of a guide for faith groups on how to conduct dialogue on HIV prevention and a theological resource to enable Christian communities to grapple with HIV prevention in the context of their faith and beliefs.

43. In 2010, the International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures, UNAIDS, in collaboration with the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance, Cordaid and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, will organize a summit of high-level religious leaders in response to HIV.

44. In 2008, collaboration with the World Evangelical Alliance led to a strong statement from the Evangelical leaders on a bolder response to HIV. They committed to develop a comprehensive HIV strategy in collaboration with their member networks, people living with HIV and other partners. The elements of this comprehensive HIV strategy were outlined by a working group supported by UNAIDS in early 2009.

45. In partnership with UNAIDS, the national AIDS programme secretariat of the Ministry of Health in Guyana has intensified its collaboration with the Guyanese faith leadership. Faith leaders themselves have now taken the lead in developing a formal partnership (the "Guyana National faith-and-hiv Coalition"). This approach will guide consolidated faith leadership engagement in the area of HIV. The coalition is comprised of faith leaders from the five main religions in Guyana, namely Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Baha'i' and Rastafari.

46. UNAIDS supported a ground-breaking initiative by Hindu religious groups, whereby over 70 prominent faith leaders from across India came together to commit to incorporating HIV information into their religious education and training of future faith leaders, as well as including AIDS in their discourses, rituals and festival celebrations. Senior Hindu religious leaders agreed to join the national effort to reverse the spread of HIV at the first meeting entitled "Faith in Action: A Hindu leaders caucus on HIV/AIDS".

F. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

Durban Review Conference

47. The outcome document of the Durban Review Conference, adopted on 24 April 2009 (A/CONF.211/L.1) emphasized the critical importance of intercultural and interreligious dialogue as a means to prevent, combat and eradicate racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

48. The outcome document noted with appreciation the increasing number of initiatives to promote intercultural dialogue and affirmed the need to intensify engagement in a constructive and genuine dialogue rooted in mutual respect and understanding (para. 23). The Conference called upon States to implement cultural rights through the promotion of intercultural and interreligious dialogue and cooperation at all levels, especially at the local and grass-roots levels (para. 109). The Conference also requested the Human Rights Council to continue promoting

such dialogue with enhanced participation of all stakeholders, including from the grass-roots level.

49. The outcome document further took note of the proposal of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), in cooperation with regional stakeholders in all parts of the world, to organize, in light of the OHCHR expert seminar on the links between articles 19 and 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, a series of expert workshops to attain a better understanding of the legislative patterns, judicial practices and national policies in the different regions of the world with regard to the concept of incitement to hatred, in order to assess the level of implementation of the prohibition of incitement, as stipulated in article 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, without prejudice to the mandate of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Complementary Standards.

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

50. In an effort to contribute to the prevention and elimination of incitement to religious hatred and its negative consequences for the human rights of individuals and communities, on 2 and 3 October 2008, OHCHR organized an expert consultation on the links between articles 19 and 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in Geneva, under the title "Freedom of expression and advocacy of religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence", with the participation of 12 experts and over 200 observers, including from Governments, United Nations agencies, regional organizations, the media and non-governmental organizations (A/HRC/10/31/Add.3).

United Nations special procedures

51. On 22 April 2009, the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, Mr. Githu Muigai, the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Ms. Asma Jahangir, and the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, Mr. Frank La Rue, issued a joint statement in Geneva identifying challenges with regard to the dissemination of expressions which offend certain believers (A/HRC/12/38). In addition to legal responses to advocacy of hatred and violence, the Special Rapporteurs stressed the need to tackle the root causes of intolerance through a broad set of policy measures, for example in the areas of intercultural and interreligious dialogue or education for tolerance and diversity.

52. In its resolution 63/181 on the elimination of all forms of intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief, the General Assembly underscored the importance of a continued and strengthened dialogue among and within religions and beliefs at all levels and with a broader participation, including of women, and welcomed the work and the interim report of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief (A/63/161). Information on her activities and recommendations on interreligious dialogue are contained in her latest reports to the Human Rights Council (A/HRC/10/8) and the General Assembly (A/64/159).

G. Department of Public Information

53. The Department of Public Information has continued to promote and raise global awareness on issues relating to interreligious and intercultural dialogue through various types of activities.

Peace, tolerance and non-violence

54. The United Nations Regional Information Centre in Brussels co-sponsored, with the Istituto d'Istruzione Superiore, the fourth edition of an exhibition entitled "Fax for Peace, Fax for Tolerance", a collection of fax messages on peace and tolerance.

55. The Director of the United Nations information centre in New Delhi delivered the Secretary-General's message for the International Day of Non-Violence at a nationally televised multi-faith prayer meeting near the memorial that marks the spot where Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated.

56. The United Nations information centre in Moscow organized a special event and displayed an exhibition of paintings to mark the International Day for Tolerance. Speakers deplored the rise of extremism and advocated intercultural dialogue and defence of human rights. The Director of the information centre also outlined United Nations activities in the area of intercultural dialogue at the annual conference of the International Centre of the Roerichs, a non-governmental organization promoting dialogue among civilizations.

57. On 15 November 2008, religious, cultural and civil society groups gathered in Zinj, Bahrain, to mark the International Day for Tolerance under the theme "Tolerance is harmony in diversity". The Director of the United Nations information centre in Manama spoke about United Nations initiatives and delivered the message of the Secretary-General for the day.

58. The eleventh edition of the Immigrants Cup, a biannual soccer tournament organized by the Immigrants League of Brazil and the United Nations information centre in Rio de Janeiro in November and December 2008, included teams from the city's immigrant communities. The information centre promoted the event as part of its outreach efforts on dialogue among civilizations, using sport as a tool for development and peace.

59. In January 2009, in cooperation with IOM, the information component of the United Nations office in Ukraine organized an event aimed at engaging Ukrainian youth in an intercultural dialogue with representatives of national minorities to break stereotypes.

Bridge-building between Palestinians and Israelis

60. In collaboration with the Government of Austria, the Department of Public Information organized an international media seminar on peace in the Middle East in Vienna on 2 and 3 December 2008, with a focus on the role of neighbouring countries in the Middle East peace process. The 2009 media seminar, held in Rio de Janeiro in July, which was co-sponsored by the Department and the Brazilian Government, addressed the role of public opinion and the media in seeking peace in the Middle East.

61. The Department supports a partnership between Israeli and Palestinian local authorities, international non-governmental organizations and UNDP to install a major waste water project in Gaza. The stakeholders met in Jerusalem on 10 June 2009 to advance this confidence-building project aimed at improving the coastal environment for both communities.

62. In collaboration with the Institute for Global Leadership, the Department arranged a press conference at United Nations Headquarters in March 2009 with a former Palestinian fighter and a former Israeli soldier who are members of the Jerusalem-based organization Combatants for Peace. The two men, who lost close relatives during the conflict, are part of a movement of more than 600 former Israeli soldiers and former Palestinian fighters who have opted for peaceful means in order to end violence in the area.

Media outreach and publications

63. The United Nations News Centre provided coverage of a number of events, including the plenary meeting of the General Assembly on the agenda item "culture of peace", the second forum of the Alliance of Civilizations and the Asian Conference of Religions for Peace, which was held in Manila in October 2008. United Nations Television provided thorough coverage of the General Assembly's plenary meeting on culture of peace and packaged segments of the coverage for broadcasters through UNifeed. The wide-ranging coverage of these issues by United Nations Radio included news stories from the second forum of the Alliance of Civilizations and the plenary of the General Assembly.

64. The *United Nations Chronicle* has published two articles that touch upon human rights and religious and/or cultural understanding: "Women's Rights as Human Rights: The Promotion of Human Rights as a Counter-Culture", by Zehra F. Kabasakal Arat; and "Are Human Rights Universal?" by Navanethem Pillay. The United Nations Intranet site, iSeek, maintained by the Department of Public Information, featured an article on the Istanbul Forum. The Department also provided worldwide distribution of a number of publications issued by the United Nations that play an important role in promoting tolerance and dialogue, including *World Religions and Norms of War*, the *Human Development Report 2004: Cultural liberty in today's diverse world* and *Earth and Faith: A Book of Reflection for Action*.

Education and outreach

65. The Department organized a cultural evening and concert entitled "Breaking the Silence, Beating the Drum" in the General Assembly Hall in observance of the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade in March 2009. As part of the commemorative events, a global videoconference brought together high school students from Canada, Saint Lucia, Trinidad and Tobago, Sierra Leone and the United States of America. The students gave an overview of their countries' history and how it was linked to the transatlantic slave trade.

66. Other events included the screening of documentary films, followed by discussions with producers; a panel discussion on the legacy of the slave trade in modern society, which was held as an NGO briefing; and a special book event focusing on slavery.

67. Recent activities in connection with the International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust and the related outreach programme included three panel discussions on the linkage between the founding principles of the Organization and its mandated activities in the areas of Holocaust remembrance and genocide prevention; the seventieth anniversary of the Kristallnacht pogrom; and hate speech on the Internet, including Holocaust denial and cyber-bullying.

68. The Department launched an educational video, entitled "Footprints for hope", to communicate the lessons of the Holocaust to secondary school children through the examination of historical artefacts. Other commemorative events included: an NGO briefing on Sephardic Jews; a book signing with the Holocaust survivors' memoirs project; an exhibit on eugenics, "Deadly Medicine: Creating the Master Race", produced by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum; and a screening of the film "Watermarks".

69. Six United Nations information centres in French-speaking African countries, along with high school students and a Holocaust survivor, participated in a videoconference organized by the Department.

70. Paolo Coelho, United Nations Messenger of Peace with a focus on intercultural dialogue, recorded a public service announcement for UNESCO on the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and contributed a video message for a global seminar for the International Year of Languages, "Language Matters! Linguistic Diversity, Globalization and Development", co-sponsored by the Department and UNESCO at United Nations Headquarters in December 2008.

71. On 17 March 2009, the Department and the Sci-Fi Channel co-hosted a panel discussion at United Nations Headquarters in connection with the final episode of the Battlestar Galactica television series. The discussion, which involved the show's cast and creators along with United Nations representatives, explored themes that are important to the Organization and the critically acclaimed television show, including reconciliation and dialogue among civilizations and faiths.

H. Department of Economic and Social Affairs

72. Within the Department, the Office for ECOSOC Support and Coordination is mandated by General Assembly resolution 62/90 to interact with entities of the United Nations system on issues pertaining to intercultural and interreligious dialogue and to coordinate their contribution to the intergovernmental process. The Office will continue to act in this capacity during the sixty-fourth session of the Assembly, including in the coordination with relevant United Nations entities and the preparation of reports for the Assembly. In this context, the Office also carried out consultations on the consideration of the possibility of proclaiming a United Nations decade, as mentioned in Assembly resolution 63/22. The outcome of these consultations is presented in section IV below.

73. The Office has also been invited to make a presentation on the work of the United Nations in this field at various meetings, and sent a representative to a preparatory meeting to the Third Congress of World and Traditional Leaders in Astana. In its resolution 63/22, the General Assembly referred to the provision of support and technical assistance by the United Nations for that event.

74. The other entity of the Department making a direct contribution in this field of work is the secretariat of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in the Division for Social Policy and Development. The work of the Forum secretariat has been presented in detail in the report submitted to the Assembly at its sixty-third session (A/63/262, paras. 76-85).

75. In addition, the ninth session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, which is to be held in May 2010, will be of great relevance to efforts to promote intercultural dialogue. The main theme of the session is "Indigenous peoples' development, with culture and identity: articles 3 and 23 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples". Article 3 of the Declaration focuses on the right to self-determination, while article 33 enshrines indigenous peoples' right to determine their own identity and the membership of their institutions.

III. Overview of other major regional and global initiatives on intercultural and interreligious dialogue

76. In addition to United Nations activities, other regional and international actors took important initiatives aimed at promoting intercultural and interreligious dialogue. Some of these initiatives are presented below. Other major initiatives were undertaken since the plenary meeting of the General Assembly on culture of peace, on 12 and 13 November 2008, while others have been planned for the near future. It should be recalled that the Assembly benefited from high-level participation at that meeting, including the presence of King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud of Saudi Arabia, who presented the outcome of the World Conference on Dialogue held in Madrid in July 2008.

77. At United Nations Headquarters, the Tripartite Forum on Interfaith Cooperation for Peace has continued to organize regular meetings, one every second month on average, to exchange information and views on issues relevant to interfaith cooperation at the United Nations. Invitations were extended to United Nations entities, such as UNICEF and the Alliance of Civilizations, to brief the Forum on their work with faith-based organizations and their contribution to interreligious dialogue. The work of the Forum is steered by a troika, chaired by the Philippines and composed of UNESCO and the Committee on Religious NGOs at the United Nations.

78. The Council of Europe held its Conference of Ministers of Culture on the theme of intercultural dialogue as a basis for peace and development in Europe and neighbouring areas in December 2008 in Baku.

79. Intergovernmental activities are carried out on a continuing basis by the Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue among Cultures. The Foundation is an integral part of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, a broad political agreement between the European Union and 10 partner countries south of the Mediterranean.

80. The Asia-Europe Meeting has continued to enhance the cultural and interfaith dimension of its work, with conferences and events on the promotion of cultural diversity as well as the holding of an Interfaith Cultural Youth Camp in Thailand in

February 2009 and its fifth Interfaith Dialogue in Seoul from 22 to 25 September 2009.

81. An International Conference on Dialogue of Civilizations and Cultural Diversity was held from 2 to 4 June 2009 in Kairouan, Tunisia, on the initiative of the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the International Organization of the Francophonie with the support of the Government of Tunisia. The declaration adopted as the outcome of the conference is a strong call for dialogue among civilizations and respect for cultural diversity.

82. The Third Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions was held in Astana on 1 and 2 July 2009. Attended by over 60 delegations of world and traditional leaders and high-level representatives of major international organizations, the Congress adopted an appeal that promotes interreligious dialogue, mutual understanding and solidarity (see A/63/918-S/2009/341). Kazakhstan also hosted a ministerial conference on "Common world: progress through diversity" on 17 October 2008 in Astana. The conference adopted the Astana Declaration, which calls for increased cross-cultural and inter-civilizational cooperation (see A/63/512-S/2008/677).

83. At a meeting held in Moscow at the initiative of Kirill I, Patriarch of Moscow and all the Russian Federation, religious leaders of the Christian, Jewish and Islamic Faiths adopted a communiqué in which they announced the establishment of a high-level consultative group of religious leaders in partnership with UNESCO.

84. A special ministerial meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement on interfaith dialogue and cooperation for peace will take place in Manila, the Philippines, from 1 to 3 December 2009. This will be the first time that the Non-Aligned Movement will harness the potential of interfaith dialogue and cooperation to advance common objectives.

85. The Parliament of the World's Religions, which brings together leaders and followers of the world's religious and spiritual communities to discuss peace, diversity and sustainability in the context of interreligious understanding and cooperation, will be in held in Melbourne, Australia, in December 2009.

86. The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia will organize the Second World Conference of Religions for Peace in 2010.

87. The Third Asia-Middle East dialogue, aimed at fostering mutual understanding between the two regions will be held in Thailand in 2010.

IV. Consideration of the possibility of proclaiming a United Nations decade for interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace

88. In its resolution 63/22, the General Assembly requested the Office for ECOSOC Support and Coordination to coordinate with UNESCO in facilitating the consideration of the possibility of proclaiming a United Nations decade for interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace. To comply with this mandate, the Secretariat, in coordination with UNESCO, carried out consultations aimed at gathering views from various relevant actors and being in a better position to assess the potential added value of such a decade and

the difficulties that this process may generate. The present chapter presents the outcome of these consultations.

89. The Office for ECOSOC Support and Coordination has liaised with the coalition of faith-based non-governmental organizations for the proclamation of a United Nations decade on interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace. The coalition of interfaith, faith-based and value-based organizations from various traditions and beliefs launched a process of reflection on a proposed decade in early 2008. At a meeting held at Ossining, New York, in March 2009, the coalition was officially constituted and the proposal for a decade formalized. The Office took part in that meeting and briefed participants on the role of the United Nations in the area of intercultural and interreligious dialogue, in particular the intergovernmental process at the Assembly. On 4 March, the Office sponsored a lunch-time briefing by the coalition at United Nations Headquarters aimed at briefing member States and civil society actors on the outcome of the Ossining meeting. The Office also facilitated interaction of representatives of the coalition with United Nations system agencies on the same day. For ease of reference, the proposal for a decade, as agreed by the coalition, is available on its website (http://faithdecadeforpeace.net/).

90. Consultations were also carried out with Member States who were invited to communicate their views on the matter in a note verbale dated 8 April 2009. A reminder extending the deadline for responding was addressed to all Permanent Representatives in New York on 26 May 2009. At the time of reporting, the Secretariat had received 23 responses from Member States: Bahrain, Belarus, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Chile, Colombia, Denmark, Egypt, France, Guyana, Indonesia, Mauritius, Morocco, the Netherlands, Peru, the Philippines, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, Senegal, Switzerland, Thailand the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

91. The majority of responses received from Member States contained positive views on the proposed decade, which was generally considered to be a welcome initiative to enhance dialogue and understanding among cultures and religions. Countries expressed their commitment to the values of respect and tolerance that the proposed decade would promote at the international level and its potential contribution to fight against extremism. This initiative would also allow for sustainable actions in support of interreligious and intercultural dialogue, beyond the International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures in 2010.

92. It was proposed that, along with the proclamation of the decade, a plan of action be developed to establish the goals to be achieved and a calendar of activities, thereby guiding the work at the international and national levels towards concrete outcomes. It was also suggested that the decade should lead to promoting the adoption of relevant legislation by Member States, supporting institutions working in this field, creating a unit in each country in charge of these issues, establishing linkages between religious institutions and encouraging research.

93. Some Member States stressed the need to closely involve civil society and the mass media in the proposed decade as an effective way to promote the values of dialogue and tolerance in society.

94. Member States also expressed a number of concerns that should be taken into account when considering the proposal. These concerns refer to both the content of the initiative and the context and process through which this idea is developed.

95. Regarding the content, the role of the United Nations in the field of interreligious dialogue was considered by some as unclear or questionable, as such a dialogue is a matter of the individuals who engage in it or of the different religions and spiritual traditions themselves. The latter have developed a number of global institutions and instruments to that end. The role of governmental and intergovernmental institutions is therefore limited to enabling this dialogue to take place and to promote the appropriate educative and sociocultural frameworks that will allow individuals to successfully engage in it. In that regard, respect for human rights, including freedom of belief and expression, was stressed by some as a requirement for the realization of the dialogue.

96. Since interreligious dialogue is a dimension of the broader intercultural dialogue and the overall culture of peace, some Member States considered that further efforts should rather be placed under the broad framework of culture, instead of establishing a separate initiative on faith. It would also be necessary to ensure consistency and common understanding of the concepts of interreligious, intercultural and intercivilizational dialogue.

97. As for the current context and the process to follow, some Member States stated that the proposed decade should be considered in the context of United Nations and other international initiatives in similar fields, including the work of UNESCO, the Alliance of Civilizations and the Tripartite Forum on Interfaith Cooperation for Peace. Interlinkages and synergies should be sought among these initiatives, and sufficient space should be given to other initiatives within the proposed decade.

98. Full consideration of the content, objectives and expected outcomes of the decade were considered necessary before Member States can take action on the proposal. This would entail a review process of the accomplishments of ongoing initiatives. A proposal was also made to prepare a comprehensive study on the feasibility of the decade.

99. The view was also expressed that the multiplication of international events (four international years in 2010 and nine ongoing decades) had weakened their effectiveness and political visibility. Consequently, the designation of new international commemorations should be avoided and priority should be given to implementing concrete activities within existing events.

100. The issue of the costs generated by the proclamation of such a decade was raised, as was the need, in a difficult budgetary context, to focus on the core of the Organization's mandate.

101. Responses received by Member States, although limited in number, have confirmed interest in promoting peace and mutual understanding through dialogue. They have also revealed the need for further work before a broad and consensual mobilization on this proposal can be reached at the intergovernmental level. In this context, Member States may want to take the following considerations into account during their forthcoming deliberations at the General Assembly.

102. In the view of the Secretary-General, it is imperative to ensure coherence and coordination of similar activities within the United Nations system. Today, intercultural, intercivilizational and interreligious issues are considered in various forums and bodies in the United Nations system, a diversity that makes the issue difficult to approach for non-United Nations actors and which, overall, tend to decrease their visibility. It is therefore important to ensure that the proposed decade is connected to ongoing activities and complements them. As one international decade and one international year have already been proclaimed in this field, it would be wise to start by assessing their outcome and drawing lessons learned that would feed into future events. As the Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World ends in 2010, its final report would be a useful vehicle to highlight activities that could be continued in a follow-up mechanism. The results of the International Year on the Rapprochement of Cultures (2010) will also be useful in evaluating what can be achieved through this type of event. Its assessment should inspire potential follow-up celebrations, such as the proposed decade, and provide a clearer picture of actors to bring on board and of activities to carry out. The successive forums of the Alliance of Civilizations, which benefit from a high-level of support by Member States, should also be taken into account in this exercise.

103. A potential added value for the proposed decade would be to provide an umbrella for the activities carried out by this multiplicity of actors on a longer period of time. In that case, its focus should be broad and encompass the various dimensions of the issue, be they cultural, civilizational or religious. The title for the proposed decade might be modified accordingly. The ultimate objectives of the decade could also be broader than the search for peace and encompass the three pillars of the United Nations, namely peace, human rights and development. This explicit support for the overall goals of the United Nations might help broaden mobilization on this initiative.

104. Finally, the role of UNESCO and its expertise on these specific issues should be emphasized. Within the United Nations system, it is the unique agency with a specific mandate to deal with these issues on a large scale, with the solid support of staff and services specialized in issues related to culture. Any future initiative should therefore recognize the leading role of UNESCO in this field and its capacity to mobilize other United Nations actors.

V. Conclusion

105. The year 2010 will be a particularly rich year for intercultural and interreligious dialogue at the United Nations. The system will celebrate the International Year on the Rapprochement of Cultures, for which UNESCO is preparing a plan of action which could inspire follow-up mechanisms. It is recalled that at its sixty-fifth session, according to resolution 60/4, the General Assembly will also consider the follow-up provided to the agenda on the dialogue among civilizations. Given the multiplicity of initiatives taken at the international level to promote intercultural and interreligious dialogue and the need to avoid a fragmentation of activities, the Assembly may wish to request a consolidated report on these various initiatives to its next session and subsequently decide on action with regard to a United Nations decade for interreligious and intercultural dialogue.